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ABSTRACT

Responses to a series of five group interviews and questionnaire surveys provide the basis for this study of the effects of declining enrollment on Ontario's curriculum. The supervisory personnel in the sample identified six factors in curriculum planning that would be influenced by declining enrollment: teachers, line administrators, curriculum support staff, school facilities and organization, capital expenditures, and processes for curriculum development. The changes in these factors would in turn affect objectives, instructional strategies, and curriculum materials. Shrinking schools, nonspecialized staffing patterns, multilevel groupings, loss of professional development opportunities for teachers, job insecurity, advanced mean age of teaching staff, and reduction in instructional materials would affect classroom interaction and curriculum implementation negatively. The authors recommend several ways to stimulate professional and curriculum development and offer ideas on organizational arrangements. (Author/WD)

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EFFECTS OF DECLINING ENROLMENTS ON THE CURRICULUM: PERCEPTIONS OF SUPERVISORY OFFICERS

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A qualitative analysis of the opinions of supervisory officers with curriculum responsibilities was carried out through a series of five group interviews/questionnaire administrations, about the effects of declining enrolments on the curriculum. Between November 30, 1977 and April 26, 1978, meetings were held with regional groups of supervisory officers in Peterborough, New Liskeard, Toronto, Kingston and London. Some eighty-nine participants representing approximately fifty-nine boards of education participated (See Table 1). Four of the five meetings were group interviews, each addressing an overlapping but somewhat different set of issues. During initial meetings emphasis was placed primarily on collection of opinion data about effects of declining enrolments on the curriculum. Subsequent meetings first collected any additional opinions not already encountered and then focused on possible solutions. The high proportion of redundant responses received during later meetings supports the view that population opinion was sampled to saturation. The third session involved a brief discussion of the purpose of the study and the distribution of a questionnaire the results of which were intended to provide information about the proportion of respondents holding certain opinions about effects identified to that point in the study. The final session presented a summary of findings, a possible set of recommendations and then focused participant responses on the adequacy of possible recommendations in view of perceived effects.

Table 1

A Brief Description of the Study Sample

Session	Location/Occasion	Date	Number of Boards	Number of Participants
1	Eastern Ontario Curriculum Superintendents' Liaison Committee Peterborough, Ontario	Nov.30,'77	8	17
2	O.A.E.A.O. Area 1 Meeting New Liskeard, Ontario	Jan.18,'78	11	17
3	Regional Curriculum Council Willowdale, Ontario	Feb. 7,'78	21	21
4	O.A.E.A.O. Area 4 Meeting Kingston, Ontario	Mar. 1,'78	7	15
5	Supervisory Officers of the Western Ontario Region London, Ontario	Apr.26,'78	12	19

For purposes of this report the "curriculum" will be defined by those curricular "dimensions" identified in the main body of professional curriculum literature (e.g. objectives, content, teaching strategies, etc.) and also identified by supervisory officers as being affected by declining enrolments. These effects, however, are indirect. The direct effects of declining enrolments on school systems are financial and organizational in nature; that is, the effects of declining enrolments appear first as a reduction in both finances available to a board and numbers of students available to a school. These reductions influence the curriculum through a set of mediating decisions about what will be referred to as "curriculum

inputs": those factors of direct cost to the school system designed to influence the school experience of students (e.g. teachers). Changes in curriculum inputs are seen to effect changes in the curriculum itself again as a result of a different set of mediating decisions.

Figure 1 illustrates the logic of our analysis and the basis for the type of recommendations made. The arrows between the four sets of variables represent decisions made and it is these decisions we seek to influence as a result of recommendations contained in this report.

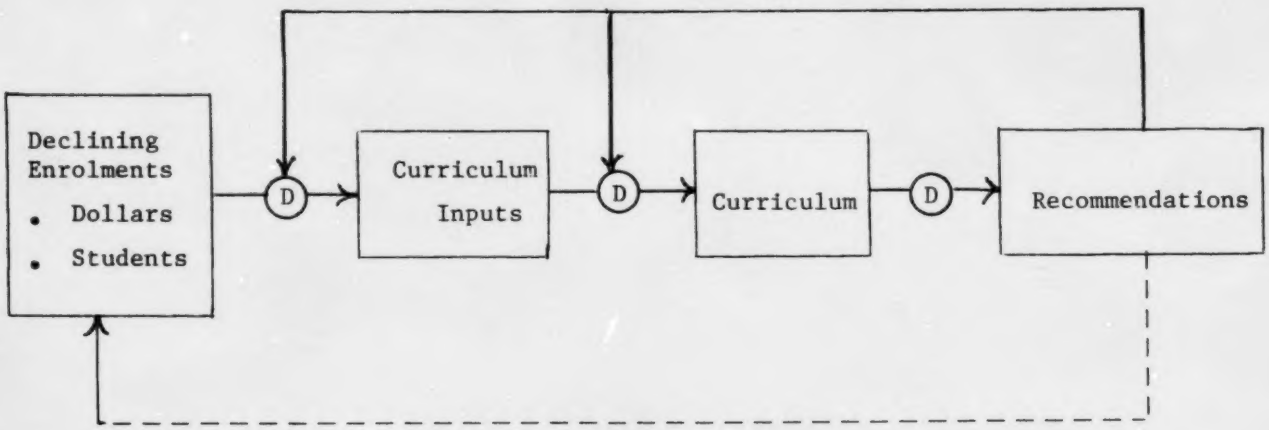

Figure 1 - - - A conception of the effects of declining enrolments on curriculum and the nature of policy recommendations

Note that many recommendations being made by others are concerned largely with decisions which have been made by the government about the "Dollars" allocated to education partly as a result of declining enrolments; some suggestions, notably those made by Commissioner Jackson himself, are actually aimed at the decisions being made by parents and potential parents which are the cause of fewer students being available to schools. Recommendations made in this report are confined to decisions about curriculum inputs and the curriculum itself.

Figure 1 also identifies the specific purposes for the study. In summary form these were:

1. To identify the current (or anticipated) decisions being made about curriculum inputs by school boards as perceived by supervisory officers with curriculum responsibilities;
2. To identify the current (or anticipated) decisions being made about the curriculum by school boards as perceived by supervisory officers with curriculum responsibilities;
3. To make recommendations designed to influence both sets of decisions referred to in 1. and 2. above as warranted.

Results

1. Curriculum Inputs.

Supervisory officers in this study identified six curriculum inputs influenced by declining enrolments: teachers, line administrators, curriculum support staff, school facilities and organization, capital

expenditures and processes for curriculum development. Changes in these curriculum inputs are important insofar as they in turn effect changes in one or more dimensions of the curriculum. As illustrated later, clusters of curriculum inputs are seen as accounting for changes identified in specific curriculum dimensions.

Teachers. Decisions are being made to reduce the teaching force. This is providing a more stable teaching population which is seen to be anxious about the current lack of job security yet competitively oriented, in many cases, toward job retention. The stability of the population is seen to provide an unprecedented opportunity to increase levels of professional competence through in-service education. This press toward in-service education, while also contributed to by the need to retrain some existing teachers in new areas of specialization, is hampered by decisions being made by boards to reduce the resources available for professional development opportunities. Supervisory officers emphasized in their responses the substantial amount of attention they are currently paying to the potential multiple consequences of teacher insecurity and job dissatisfaction.

Curriculum support staff. A significant number of school boards have dramatically reduced curriculum support staff. In these instances this group of personnel is seen as the most vulnerable, apparently because many trustees are unclear about the value received from such people for the money invested. This seems to be partly a

problem of the administrators responsible not articulating effectively the role of support staff in the system. In a number of systems where careful attention has been given to the roles of resource teachers, consultants and co-ordinators, these positions have been maintained. A significant proportion of supervisory officers felt strongly that such maintenance was essential if future improvements in the curriculum were to be made. Because of the role played by support staff in most systems, their reduction signifies the loss of the main source of instructional help for teachers.

Fewer resources are now being allocated to the hiring of curriculum writing teams or other ad hoc teams with curriculum tasks. This is seen as less necessary in some instances because of the amount of curriculum guideline development already engaged in by some boards. Where such teams are still working, there is a tendency for the work to take place more during the regular school year, by releasing teachers from classroom duties, and less during the summer period. Overall reduction in this class of activity was cited as reducing the opportunities available to teachers and others for on-the-job professional development; professional development was identified as the main advantage of such curriculum work by many administrators. As future policy initiatives emerge from the Ministry of Education boards are perceived by most supervisory officers to be less likely to engage in local guideline development. More selecting from existing provincial resources is likely to take place.

Administrators. Line administrators are facing workload pressures as a result of two types of decisions. Attempts toward greater administrative efficiency with smaller school units is resulting in such organizational arrangements as school twinnings, the combining of departments and reduction in the number of vice-principal positions. These decisions are increasing the load of normal organizational maintenance responsibilities of remaining administrators. At the same time, these same administrators are being identified as the most likely personnel to pick up the curriculum duties left unattended with the reduction of curriculum support staff. More than ever before the elementary school principal is being viewed by his system as the school curriculum leader. The department head is being asked more frequently than ever before to play a consulting role beyond the bounds of his or her own department and school, usually on a family of schools basis. While professional development for administrators is an obvious part of the solution to some of these expanded responsibilities both lack of time and reduced professional development budgets make it difficult to provide. The reduction in positions of responsibility also reduces the opportunities provided by promotion to recognize professional competence.

School facilities and organizations. Declining enrolment is being accompanied by decisions to combine existing schools in some instances, combine students from multiple grades in single classrooms and unbalance classroom pupil-teacher ratio (large increase in PTR in large schools to offset small PTR's in shrinking schools). Decisions are also being made about staff allocations which leave many existing

libraries and resource centres unattended by librarian staff. In addition to the influence on administrative duties, these decisions are seen as reducing the availability of specialized facilities to some students and increasing the complexity of the instructional task for the teacher. Some supervisory officers feel that especially split grades and unbalanced PTR's are contributing to increased teacher dissatisfaction. A significant number of supervisory officers interviewed, however, pointed to the potential advantages to be realized by such organizational arrangements. They also pointed out that the job environment of the secure teacher was still a highly desirable one in spite of recent changes, not an environment to be bemoaned, by any means, in relation to most other job environments.

Capital expenditures. Most boards appear to have responded to declining resources by shaving their capital expenditures budget to the bone. In some instances this has meant no replacement or repair of aging instructional equipment and substantial reductions in budgets available to schools for the purchase of textbooks and other classroom curriculum material.

Curriculum development processes. Changes in a number of curriculum inputs aggregate to suggest significant alterations in the typical range of processes used for curriculum development. Reduced consulting staff, fewer resources for writing teams, pressures toward expanded curriculum roles on the part of school level administrative staff, increasingly stable and well-qualified teaching

force all suggest on the one hand, the possibility of more school level and less system level curriculum development. This possibility was identified by a small number of supervisory officers along with possible increased pressure on the Ministry of Education to develop more precise, detailed curriculum guidelines. These two pressures in combination can be seen as a rationale for less board-wide curriculum intervention.

On the other hand the largest proportion of respondents identified greater inter-board and regional collaboration as a likely outcome of these changes in curricular inputs. Such collaboration is certainly being actively explored now with respect to sharing locally produced guidelines, short-term sharing of consulting staff and general information dissemination especially among superintendents within regions.

2. Curriculum Dimensions

Curriculum dimensions identified by supervisory officers as being affected by changing decisions about curriculum inputs were threefold: objectives, instructional strategies and curriculum materials. This section of the report identifies the effects on these dimensions perceived by supervisory officers and outlines whatever causal links were hypothesized by respondents between these effects and the curriculum inputs already discussed.

Objectives. The effects on curriculum objectives were perceived to come about as a result of shrinking school organizations and the effects on teachers of both non-specialization and the need to attend

to multi-age groups in split grades. Shrinking schools especially at the secondary level were seen to reduce both the number of different courses that could be offered to students as well as the number of different levels at which courses could be offered. Some administrators had already declared a moratorium on approval of experimental courses. Specifically, courses being maintained in both French and English, French immersion and special education programs at the elementary level were viewed as being in jeopardy. At the intermediate elementary level, especially, shrinking schools were perceived to reduce the opportunity to offer courses in art, music, and vocational education. With fewer specialists less rotation was possible. Especially at the elementary school level, the negative effects of split grades were seen to be a narrowing in the range of objectives teachers were instructing toward. "Core" objectives would be maintained but such "non-essential" objectives as geometry in the junior division and creative writing were likely to be neglected.

Among the advantages cited as a result of these trends were a greater concentration by the school on a more limited and realistic set of objectives than is currently the case. More pressure for joint community-board decision-making about educational priorities was also cited. Disadvantages included the loss of courses offered in two languages, and less opportunity for teacher initiated course innovation. The effects on students were seen to be critically negative. Fewer options were believed to diminish general student

interest in the school program. The loss of specialized and special education courses was seen to have a substantial and negative effect on the retention rate and feelings of failure experienced by low achieving students.

In sum, the dominant perception of supervisory officers seemed to be that shrinking schools, non specialized staffing patterns and multi-age groupings interfered seriously with the goal of equalizing educational opportunity.

Instructional strategies. Perceived effects on classroom interaction as a result of changes in curriculum inputs are largely detrimental. Loss of some existing professional development opportunities, job insecurity, the advancing mean age of teaching staffs, reduced specialization and fewer instructional materials are seen as causes. Supervisory officers reported that these factors were now or in the future likely to lead to less individualized student attention, less student grouping for instruction, reduced opportunities for taking excursions. Less enthusiastic teachers were likely to be working with less highly motivated students with the result that even though the same wide range of objectives may be sought, they are not being as well achieved.

Two positive outcomes with respect to instruction were identified. Boards were already actively using, much more than in the past, community resources most notably in the arts. Many reports were given of music, drama and other arts groups from both inside and outside the

community being utilized for instructional purposes at minimum or no cost to the board. Split grades, it was also reported, were not all bad. A decade ago the advantages of such groupings were being brought to the attention of educators in the cause of "continuous progress".

Instructional materials. Reductions in both local guideline development and capital expenditures for instructional material were viewed as having largely negative effects on the curriculum. Less direct guidance was seen to be available to the teacher in guiding curriculum planning. Further, there was a reported trend toward more exclusive use of textbook material. Textbooks were viewed as but one of many sources of learning material required to satisfactorily achieve the objectives of the curriculum.

It is worth emphasizing that the reported effects on curriculum dimensions are as perceived by supervisory officers now or as anticipated by them in the future. A significant minority of respondents reported that enrolments in their systems had not yet started to decline much; others indicated that their experience with the decline was very new. For these reasons, and because of the qualitative nature of the data, the results should be viewed as increasingly reliable as they are combined with results from other studies in Ontario school systems now and in the next few years.

Recommendations

Recommendations emerging directly out of this study are intentionally aimed at providing short-to-intermediate-term solutions to effects which respondents have identified as negative. These recommendations are directed toward three levels of curriculum decision-making; the school system, the school and the university/faculty of education. In each case, where appropriate the recommendations focus on altering normative decisions about a subsample of curriculum inputs; professional development in relation to both teachers and administrators, curriculum development processes and school organization.

Most of these recommendations were identified independently or considered workable by respondents in the study; in many cases they represent current responses to declining enrolments that have proven worthwhile.

Recommendations for the school system.

1. Professional development:

1.1 Stimulate action research by teachers in their own schools and classrooms perhaps by providing small amounts of seed money;

1.2 Initiate a program of short term exchanges with school systems (e.g., elementary principal trades jobs with secondary Physical Education teacher for a week)

1.3 More rigorous assessment of teacher needs prior to the conduct of in-service programs;

1.4 Orient in-service toward more "practical" outcomes;

1.5 Involve teachers' peers as part of the in-service experience;

1.6 Provide in-service which is ongoing and developmental;

1.7 Provide opportunities for administrators to increase their skills in the management of curriculum.

2. Curriculum development:

2.1 Attach teachers to curriculum development projects that might be going on in faculties or the Ministry of Education;

2.2 Use existing salaries where available to hire ad hoc groups of teachers for special, short-term assignments;

2.3 Stimulate action research by teachers in their own schools and classrooms perhaps by providing small amounts of "seed" money;

2.4 Stimulate the formation of active regional curriculum councils;

2.5 Disseminate locally produced curriculum materials to other boards on request;

2.6 Contract, at cost, for use of consultants/resource staff from other boards in areas of strong need for short-term periods (consultants could possibly be hired by a region or a consortium of boards);

2.7 Develop some curriculum material of widespread value on a regional basis;

2.8 Systematically review and adopt good curriculum materials from other boards with adaptation when required rather than always trying to develop own material;

2.9 Spend greater proportions of time on the implementation and evaluation of existing material and less on its initial development;

2.10 Use greater discrimination in deciding to develop local curriculum guidelines. Emphasis should be given to areas of high need, primarily, not comprehensive coverage of all areas of the curriculum;

2.11 Devote more attention to identifying and incorporating those characteristics of curriculum material that demonstrably improve student achievement.

3. Organizational arrangements:

3.1 Make term appointments for positions of responsibility (perhaps four-year appointments);

3.2 Initiate a program of short-term exchanges with school systems (e.g. elementary principal trades jobs with secondary Physical Education teacher for a week);

3.3 Initiate a transfer policy for Department Heads;

3.4 Increase the amount and quality of teacher evaluation on the part of the principal;

3.5 Develop alternative work patterns for teachers (e.g. greater use of part-time positions, job sharing);

3.6 Clarify the role of curriculum support staff as a means of increasing their effectiveness;

3.7 Supervisory officers in smaller boards have much the same set of tasks even though the number of students may decline. The number of schools, programs, etc., rather than students should be used as the unit of analysis when estimating the extent of supervisory duties.

Recommendations for the school.

4. Professional development:

(see recommendations 1.1 to 1.7)

5. Curriculum development:

(see recommendations 1.1 to 1.7)

6. Organizational arrangements:

6.1 More effective (and interesting) use of existing time allotments especially in secondary schools. This recommendation involves reorganizing existing preparation periods so that department heads and teachers have significant blocks of time (half day to one day). Given such blocks, school or system curriculum problems may be assigned to committees of such people with some guidance as to how the problem might be dealt with. Examples offered of such problems by study respondents included textbook selection and course analysis. When principals are used for this purpose, the results are reported to be useful to them in helping fill their responsibilities in the curriculum area;

6.2 Systematically move teachers through the grades especially in elementary schools;

6.3 Make more use of "other adults" in the classroom (e.g., parents, senior students, senior citizens, other teaching assistants);

6.4 Make greater use of community resources not only in the arts as is presently being done extensively but in the social services through community-involvement projects;

6.5 Encourage regular staff planning meetings to make curriculum decisions.

Recommendations related to the universities.

7. Professional development:

7.1 Make better use of university personnel for expert contribution to in-service training but in collaboration with trainees;

7.2 Develop short, intensive courses that might span two to five days in length and be offered on site under contract with school boards;

7.3 Develop a coherent developmental pre-service, in-service, graduate studies program;

7.4 Encourage university departments to provide undergraduate courses for teachers in need of specialized retraining, in segments of time more consistent with school constraints (e.g., intensive one-week courses).

8. Curriculum development:

8.1 Make greater use of university personnel in the development of curriculum material.

9. Other:

A follow-up to CODE should be undertaken, in some form, one to two years from now when a larger proportion of boards have had more direct experience in dealing with declining enrolments.

Table 2 summarizes the main variables discussed as results and recommendations of this study.

Table 2

Summary of Results and Recommendations

Curriculum Inputs	Curriculum Dimensions	Recommendations
. Teachers	. Objectives (restricted range)	. Teachers/Administrators professional development
. Curriculum Support Staff	. Instructional Strategies (less individualization)	. Curriculum Development Processes
. Administrators	. Curriculum Material (less variety)	. School Organization
. School Facilities, organizations		
. Capital Expenditures		
. Curriculum Dev. Processes		

Changes in decisions currently being made about selected curriculum inputs have been recommended that seem most likely to counter identified negative pressures on three curriculum dimensions. These recommendations are all viewed as practical by a large proportion of the sample of supervisory officers in this study given existing and anticipated resources.